# Colours, Words, and Spiders

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# Colours, Words, and Spiders

by air_of_the_Waterfall

Summary

Hannibal spends an afternoon in littlespace. He and Will paint pictures, navigate effective communication, and Hannibal makes a friend.

Notes

I've Google Translated just a few words into languages that I don't speak, so hopefully nothing went horribly wrong.

“Will?”

“Yeah?”

“What colour goes with blue?”

Will looked up from his fly-tying desk and over his shoulder to where Hannibal sprawled on the living room floor. He’d clearly deemed this the official spot for arts and crafts time, seeing as he’d arranged himself in a similar way —on his front, in pajamas, feet swinging in the air— for several weeks in a row. Giant sheets of unrolled paper covered nearly the entire carpet, doused in smears of acrylic paint and crinkling where he leaned on them. Old brushes that had begun to fray were lined up carefully within arm’s reach, and the globs of paint rested in designated plastic containers. By now, many were looking less like the rainbow Will had given him and more like a puddle of muddy water. Hannibal wasn’t allowed to use his real, expensive art supplies when he was little anymore. Not after the paw print incident.

“What do you mean?” Will asked around the affectionate flutter in his chest.

Hannibal’s eyes fixed on him with just a spark of impatience. In order to speak, he had to stop sucking on his pacifier again. Popping it out of his mouth, he repeated, “What colour makes green with blue?”

English, being his third or fourth language, didn’t come easily to him at such a young age. He had no trouble if he regressed to around six or older, but today he mulled the sentence over like a puzzle in his hands.

Will understood, turning back to his desk and allowing a grin to break through. “Blue and *yellow* make green,” he offered.

“Thank you, Will.”

“No problem.”

With a racket of crinkling paper, Hannibal went back to his work and crawled around to reach a far corner of the page. Will shook his head and snipped a loose thread from his lure, but he was smiling and failed to pay true attention to the task. He was still adjusting to his role as a caregiver, and these fleeting moments reminded him that Hannibal wasn’t just pretending; the Chesapeake Ripper currently had the faculties of a four-year-old, only accessing a few rooms in the vast palace of his mind. Evidently, colour theory was not among the things he stored in those rooms.

A few minutes passed of Hannibal merrily painting away and Will pretending to do his own thing. Their pack of dogs lounged in a heap by the doorway, and Winston Jr. kept a knowing, protective eye on Hannibal. Rosamund and Dante played tug-of-war with a gross rope toy and tackled each other into the wall.

Sure enough, this limbo didn’t last long.

“Will?”

Muffling a laugh, Will turned in his chair this time. Hannibal now sat perched on his knees, glaring at the mucky containers.

“Yes, Hanni?”

“Paint. Please.”

“Do you want more paint, or do you want me to paint with you?”

“Both ones. Please.”

Will opened the drawer full of fresh supplies, grabbed as many bottles as he could carry plus a roll of paper towel, and went to sit by his side. Hannibal grinned with just a sliver of teeth, clapping his hands.

“Those are excellent manners,” Will said gently. “What colours do you want this time?”

Hannibal furrowed his brow, searching for the English words, then said, *“Violetinė ir raudona.* Please.”

After quickly wiping the ruined stuff out of its containers, Will uncapped the purple and red paints to pour them. He was beginning to learn the Lithuanian vocabulary that Hannibal used most often: colours, the names of toys, foods, and anything else he might need. It felt like the least Will could do.

Hannibal watched over his shoulder while the swirls of colour unspooled and puddled around the plastic. He replaced his pacifier, a glassy film forming over his bright, focused eyes, and settled back on the floor to reach for a paint brush. When he held one out to Will on his open palm, Will fell a just bit more in love.

He took the brush and smiled. “Thank you very much, sweetheart.”

Hannibal flung himself at Will and snuggled up for a hug. Around the pacifier, he mumbled, *“Ačiū.”*

Will enfolded him in his arms completely, then gently rocked him back and forth for a moment until Hannibal’s eyelids began to droop.

Will smiled. “Sleepy already?”

Hannibal nudged his shoulder with his head and yawned. “Mm. Warm.”

After a few minutes, he detached himself and crawled back over to paint. Will sat cross-legged and made absent trails of colour with his own brush, watching Hannibal’s expressions flicker through contentment, concentration, displeasure at a small mistake, and determination. In the background, one of the dogs — Georgia — wandered from the pile and began to stalk something across the floor, sniffing along and wagging her tail.

Hannibal spared a glance for the scene and must have deemed it worthy of his attention, because he quickly stopped painting and turned his head to stare. A slow blink, then his eyes widened in curiosity as he scrambled on his hands and knees to Georgia's side. When he crouched low to the floor and studiously tracked the march of a spider, Will suppressed an affectionate guffaw. Then came a shocking wave of pride that had no right to make him tear up; his little monster was *hunting*.

Georgia sulked away at having her prize stolen, but she knew better than to put up a fuss. Will scratched between her ears when she came to him for consolation, and he grinned at her before discreetly shifting closer to watch Hannibal. The pacifier bobbed a bit more aggressively, and his eyes glowed with interest as he extended his index finger and placed it in the spider's path. The spider, indifferent, merely swerved around it and continued on its way.

Will almost snickered at the grumpy furrow of Hannibal's brow. He was used to getting exactly what he wanted, even if it took a while.

On the second attempt, he placed his whole hand palm-up on the floor, and after a hesitant moment of searching with its tiny feelers, the spider inched its way up and began to explore. Hannibal beamed and rose up to sit on his knees, watching it for a moment before extending the hand to Will and removing his pacifier.

*"Voras."*

Will grinned. "Spider?"

Hannibal nodded, still smiling, then looked back down at the creature and mumbled to himself while gently trying to poke it.

"*Voras. Ragno. Araignée.* Spider…"

Will knelt by his side again and gently touched his wrist. "I don't think it enjoys being poked at, Hanni."

Hannibal blinked at him. "I won't hurt it."

"I know that," Will said, "but it doesn't. To a spider, you're really big and scary."

Looking fondly back at his captive, Hannibal said in singsong, "Small spider. Small spider. *Petite araignée.* Spiders aren't scared of us. They climb, climb, climb."

He turned his hand over when the intrepid creature tried to go upside-down. It was slightly larger than a thumbnail. Hannibal was enchanted with it, and Will with him.

"Spiders are pretty. I like them in the castle. People can't squish them."

Will smiled again, a flare of melancholy pinching his eyes. "I'm glad. They really haven't done anything wrong, have they? They just live and eat and keep bugs away."

Hannibal nodded. "Pretty."

“Do you want a jar to keep it in?” Will asked, thinking of sun-drenched days catching bugs and frogs with his dad. It was one of the only childhood memories that he actively clung to.

However, Hannibal’s expression shattered in horrified grief, and he adamantly shook his head. For a moment, the clear spark of Adult Hannibal returned to his eyes, then dissolved like shaken sand in the wind. His hands formed a protective cradle around the spider, and his voice cracked as frenzied snow clouds seemed to condense around him.

“No, Will, no!”

“What’s wrong?”

Will tried to disguise his alarm, even as his palms grew sweaty.

Hannibal squeezed his eyes shut, shook his head until tears flew free, and began to babble and cry in Lithuanian too quickly for Will to follow. All the dogs crowded him with concerned wet noses and huge black eyes. The small grey bundle that was Cephy climbed onto Hannibal’s lap with a whine, and he cracked his eyes open to see the pack and tentatively pet them. The spider was safe, if a little confused, on his elbow.

Hannibal looked back at Will, still crying and gasping, and said something else.

Will scratched the back of his own neck. “H-Hannibal, I can’t understand you. Can you take a deep breath?”

With a small, muffled choking noise, Hannibal did.

“Can’t lock him up,” he pleaded. “Can’t lock him up. He needs air and climbing and his web.”

Oh. *Oh.*

Frigid, roiling guilt crashed through Will like a wingless plane, wrenching him apart from the inside. His throat ached, and his heart thrashed in search of its other half. He nudged Cephy away, then gathered Hannibal into his arms.

“I won’t trap it,” he cooed, smoothing Hannibal’s feather-soft hair and breathing his clean soap scent. “No jars, no boxes. Spiders aren’t meant for cages, are they?”

“N-no,” Hannibal whimpered. “No, no, no.”

Will held him tighter and gently rocked him again. “Everything’s okay, Hanni. Everything’s okay now.”

“Don’t trap the spider. Don’t make him go by himself.”

“I won’t. It’s alright, sweetheart. I promise.”

A few minutes passed with Hannibal curled up on Will’s lap, hiding his tear-stricken face in his shoulder. His free hand trembled as it flexed open and closed in the fabric of Will’s shirt.

Eventually, Hannibal sniffled and uncharacteristically wiped tears on his sleeve. When he looked down at the spider again, it was halfway down his other arm and he giggled.

“Fast.”

Will swallowed and forced a smile. “Yeah, it is. It’s got eight legs to work with.”

Hannibal studied him for a moment, alert and perceptive as always, then asked, “What’s wrong, Will?”

“I’m okay if you’re okay,” Will assured him, smoothing Hannibal’s hair to ground himself. “I’m glad you feel better. I’m sorry I upset you.”

Cuddling closer, Hannibal yawned with a lopsided blink and said, “It’s okay.”

Will grinned for real this time. “I think it’s nap time for you, little one.”

“No,” Hannibal sniped, even as he yawned again.

“Okay, you don’t have to sleep, but how about I bring down Ceasar and your LeapFrog book for quiet time? When you’re done, you can help me make pancakes for dinner.”

This earned Will a smile and wide, sparkling eyes. Hannibal nodded like a bobble-head, but then remembrance struck his face and he frantically looked around.

“Spider? Spider!”

“Don’t worry, we’ll find it.”

Will guided him to sit up so they could search his fuzzy green onesie for the fugitive arachnid. Eventually, it scrambled out from the fold of his pocket, and Hannibal giggled while Will swept it up and offered it back to him. With his new friend in his palm again, Hannibal visibly relaxed and went back to addressing it in French. He held it up to watch at various angles, fond and curious and unafraid. That was the most wonderful thing about Hannibal in the sea of his calm contradictions.

“Let’s let it get on with its day now,” Will coaxed. “Set it free.”

Hannibal nodded and gently lowered his hand to the floor. The spider took a moment of wandering before it hurried away and began to climb the wall. Hannibal and Will watched it go all the way up and disappear out of sight, and Hannibal’s face broke into a huge smile.

“Bye-bye! Bye-bye!” he said.

Will squeezed his eyes shut for a moment, blindsided by adoration that tried to burst from his ribcage like flowers. Then, he carefully picked Hannibal up to set him on the couch. There was plenty of room, and once he got settled, curled up on his side, he looked up at Will expectantly.

“Will?”

“Yes?”

“What’s *wrong*?” he demanded.

Will let himself crack, gently and honestly. With a sigh, he knelt to sweep Hannibal’s bangs off his face and said, “Nothing’s wrong, Hannibal. You know how much I love you, right?”

Hannibal smiled, slow and a bit shy. For just a moment, Will could see that deep red spark again, sharp and brilliant before wandering back into halls full of music. Adult Hannibal would come back when he saw fit, but there was no rush.

“I know, Will.”

“Good.”

Hannibal seemed to remember something again, sat up to look across the room, and asked, “Soother, please?”

Will leapt to his feet. “Oh. Yeah! Of course. Just let me clean it first.”

He grabbed the pacifier where it lay abandoned on the floor, took it to the kitchen, and washed it under the sink. The whole time, he marveled at how easy and normal it felt, and he was beginning to realize that he needed this role as much as Hannibal needed his. Neither of them referred to Will as Little Hannibal’s father figure, but caring for him scratched that itch for Will nonetheless. He’d felt an obligation to Abigail, and he’d tried his best for Walter, but neither had been like this.

Hannibal was curled up with his eyes closed when Will got back, but Will knew he wasn’t asleep, just off somewhere in his imagination.

“Here you go.” Will offered the pacifier, and Hannibal opened his eyes and mouth to take it. His deliberate slow blink said, *Thank you.*

Grinning, Will hurried upstairs to the cozy attic where Hannibal kept everything he liked when regressed: toys, games, outrageously patterned pajamas, and the like. A massive plush dinosaur named Caesar was the target today, as usual, and Will shoved it through the trap door and down the ladder. After fetching the LeapFrog book and climbing down, he hauled it all back to the living room.

Hannibal clapped his hands, scrambling to get comfortable nestled against Caesar with the book on his knees. It was made of thin plastic covered in educational cartoons, and Hannibal opened it to a page about colours. He flipped a switch, watching intently, and a light came on with a cheerful sound. When he touched the section labelled “blue,” it read the word aloud and prompted him to find yellow. With a beatific smile, he found it and looked proudly up at Will.

Will chuckled. “Good job, sweetheart.”

Hannibal would be mesmerized by this activity for about fifteen minutes, giving Will time to clean up the paint and start dinner. Pancakes weren’t a tall order, so he just mixed up the

batter to avoid Hannibal making a mess.

Soon enough, Hannibal padded into the kitchen, eager to help pour batter into perfect circles and spinning in delight once they were sizzling on the pan. He'd left the book on, and a jaunty tune about planets drifted in from the living room. The dogs peeked their heads in, knowing they weren't allowed in the kitchen, and Will basked in the overall perfection of the moment.

As if sharing a secret, he asked, "Want bacon to go with them?"

Hannibal whispered back, "The special kind?"

Will grinned, and Hannibal bolted for the fridge.

Outside, snow fell in flurries and icicles guarded the porch. Hundreds of miles away, Jack Crawford was working himself to death in search of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. Across the ocean, the bones of Will's firefly man still hung in Hannibal's childhood home.

On days like this, none of that dared to matter.

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